

The Effect of Conflict Theory Based Decision-Making Skill Training Psycho-Educational Group Experience on Decision Making Styles of Adolescents*

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Abstract

In this study, the effect of conflict theory based decision making skill training group applications on decision making styles of adolescents was investigated. A total of 36 students, including 18 students in experimental group and 18 students in control group, participated in the research. When assigning students to experimental group or control group, Decision Making Scale for Adolescents, Socio-Economic Status Scale, Problem Solving Inventory, Self-Esteem Scale, Locus of Control Scale, and Parental Style Inventory were used. While the experimental group participated in a psycho-educational based group application that was based upon Conflict Theory, the control group did not participate in any kind of application. The findings of the research indicated that decision making skill training group applications increased the self-esteem level of adolescents and the application of adaptive coping style, whereas there was a decline in the application of maladaptive coping style and this effect seemed to be long term.

Key Words

Adolescents, Decision Making, Decision Making Styles, Decision Making Skill Training.

In this increasingly developing and changing world, people face more frequently the kind of situations that demand decision-making processes. Developing technology in particular has introduced a variety of options for people. An individual in a routine daily life can take very simple decisions but also social, economical, educational, political and professional decisions too that have the potential to change the course of their lives. If the individual

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is capable of making effective decisions, this ability accelerates the satisfaction taken from life and sense of wellness; if the reverse situation is true then the individual feels entrapped in life (Çolakkadıoğlu & Güçray, 2007). Decisions indeed shape and direct our lives in a certain sense.

Researchers focusing on decision-making process have generally described decision-making as the process of selecting one specific option amongst a list of potential alternatives (Beyt-Marom, Fischoff, Jacobs-Quadrel, & Furby, 1991; Furby & Beyt-Marom, 1992; Miller & Byrnes, 2001; Nelson, 1984; Von Winterfeldt, & Edwards, 1986; Zunker, 1998) and they have noted that decision-making process is under the influence of intuition, attachment, family, peer pressure, memory, prejudice, information coding, feeling, motivation, stress, psychoactive substances, personality traits and problem-solving (Byrnes, 1998; Klaczynski, Byrnes, & Jacobs, 2001; Sinangil, 1993). Initially, decision-making had been described as an unteachable skill and considered to develop- just like language development, mental maturation and social communication- parallel to rise in age (Baron & Brown, 1991). However recent studies have manifested that decision-making skill can be taught (Baron & Brown; Byrnes; Byrnes, Miller, & Reynolds, 1999; Fletcher & Wooddell, 1981; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Klaczynski et al. 2001; Lewis, 1983; Mann, Harmoni et al. 1989; Schvaneveldt & Adams, 1983; Simon, 1980; Strauss & Clark, 1992; Taal & De Carvalho, 1997). In that aspect certain programs aiming to develop decision-making skills have been generated (Bal, 1998; Botvin, 1983; Ersever, 1996; Mann, Harmoni et al., 1989; Mann, Harmoni, Power, Beswick, & Ormond, 1988; Nickerson, Perkins, & Smith, 1985; Ross, 1981; Schinke & Gilchrist, 1984; Spitzhoff, Ramirez, & Wills, 1982; Şeyhun, 2000; Taal & De Carvalho).

A review of foreign literature presented that there are numerous educational programs focusing on developing decision-making skills of adolescents to support them in taking more logical and rational decisions. The researches conducted in our country are limited to two studies analyzing decision-making skills of university (Ersever, 1996) and primary education (Şeyhun, 2000) students. Nonetheless there is not a single research based on conflict theory covering secondary education grade 9 students, testing the effects of psycho-educational group based group applications on decision-making styles of students. Once this necessity is taken into consideration then it can be investigated whether decision-making skill training group applications are effective in students' use of self-esteem and positive coping styles in decision-making situations and diminishing the use of negative coping styles. In present study it has been aimed to analyze the effect and persistency of decision-making skill training group applications based on conflict theory on decision-making styles of students.

Method

Research Design

The research is in experimental design and employs one of the types of experimental design known as "pretest-posttest control group true experimental model" (Karasar, 2004).

Research Group

The research was conducted for a period of six weeks with 36 ninth graders (including 18 in the experimental and 18 in the control group) studying at two State Anatolian High Schools during 2008-2009 Academic Year Fall Semester in Adana City Seyhan

District. In the experimental group the researches have been executed by a researcher (the leader) and assistant leader, whereas in the control group no procedure has been implemented and during this process no decision-making lessons have been integrated into course schedules. In experimental group, there are collectively 18 participants, composed of 10 girls and 8 boys, and in the control group, there is a total of 18 participants consisting of 9 girls and 9 boys. The average age of participants both in the experimental and the control groups is 15.

Measures

Personal Information Form: In this personal information form prepared by researcher, the questions aimed to find out if students' parents were together or separated, whether they participated before in a similar skill program, if they had experienced a traumatic incidence lately, whether they received or currently receiving any psychiatric treatment, their socio-economic levels etc. These questions were believed to exhibit qualities that might be effective on the results of research.

Interview Form: Within the scope of this research, participant students were presented, in addition to measures, an interview form to detect their eligibility to participate in the group. The interview form was based on the forms prepared by DeLucia-Waack (2006) and Morganett (2005). Placing the context of the prepared interview form into the center, a pre-interview was conducted to detect group members. In the interview form, there were psycho-educational groups and the context of selected decision-making skill training group applications, the objectives, duration, average number of participants of group, and the rules to follow.

Adolescent Decision-Making Questionnaire (ADMQ): This questionnaire on the whole determines self-esteem in decision-making process and decision-making styles. It had been developed by Mann, Harmoni et al. (1989), and then was adapted into Turkish by Çolakkadıoğlu and Güçray (2007). It consists of 30 items and 5 sub-scales which are respectively self-esteem, vigilance, cop-out, panic, and complacency in decision-making. In several researches, it was detected that internal consistency coefficient of ADMQ's sub-scales varied between .59 and .73, test re-test reliability coefficient between .59 and .65 (Harmoni, 1989; Tuinstra, Van Sonderen, Groothoff, Vanden Hevvel, & Post, 2000). Turkish adaptation of questionnaire was executed in two consequent stages and two different samplings. In the explanatory factor analysis conducted via varimax rotation method ADMQ's Cronbach's alpha coefficient was alternately detected as .79, .78, .77, .65 and .73 for self-esteem, vigilance, panic, cop-out and complacency sub scales; test-retest consistency figures were respectively set as .80, .81, .82, .80 and .86. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted for five-factor model and it was determined that consistency indicator data explained the model effectively (Çolakkadıoğlu & Güçray, 2007).

Group-Related Measures Survey Form (GRMSF): Group-related Measures Survey Form (GRMSF) had been developed by DeLucia-Waack (2006) and was adapted into Turkish by the researcher. The form was filled out by the group leader in measuring the behaviors of members in psycho-educational groups. In the first stage, the expressions available in the form were translated from English into Turkish by the researcher. In order to detect the reliability of form, kappa values were examined. First measurement inter-evaluator kappa values ranged between .70 and .82, final measurement kappa values from .52 to .86, for the first evaluator kappa values ranged between .52 and .91, for the second evaluator kappa values changed between .50 and .94. Consistency levels of the items were found to be sufficient (Sencan, 2005).

Evaluation at the End of Group by Members (EEGM): Evaluation at the End of Group by Members Form (EEGM) had been developed by DeLucia-Waack (2006) and was adapted into Turkish by researcher. It was used to evaluate the acquisitions of members from psycho-educational groups and their feedbacks related to group process. In the first stage, the expressions available in the form were translated from English into Turkish by the researcher. In order to prevent the potential problems relevant of translation the expressions were analyzed elaborately by linguists closely familiar with both languages then reevaluated by Psychological Counseling and Guidance experts well-experienced in both languages. The necessary changes were conducted subsequent to evaluating the problems determined by these experts. Following the changes, it was implemented on a group of 5 students and it was understood that the expressions were wellunderstood. Furthermore, it was conducted in the last session of 2nd pilot study and was detected that members had no difficulty in understanding the questions.

Additionally, in the first stage of research, Problem-Solving Inventory developed by Heppner and Petersen (1982) and adapted into Turkish by Taylan (1990) and Şahin, Şahin, and Heppner (1993); Self-Esteem Scale developed by Bogenç (1995), Locus of Control Scale developed by Nowicki-Strickland (1973) and adapted into Turkish by Öngen (2003); Parenting Style Inventory developed by Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) and adapted into Turkish by Yılmaz (2000) have been employed. By means of these scales, it was detected whether there was a differentiation between average scores of the experimental and the control groups.

The Context and Preparation of Decision-Making Skill Training Developed on the Basis of Conflict Theory Based Group Applications

The context of decision making skill training group applications conducted in current research was prepared on the basis of Conflict Theory developed by Janis and Mann (1977). Additionally, GOFER curriculum prepared by Mann, Harmoni and Power (1988) in order to develop decision-making skills was used as the main resource. In addition to main resources, the contexts of programs prepared to serve similar goals were employed (Baron, Laskey, & Brown, 1989; Brown, Campbell, & Laskey, 1990 as cited in Baron & Brown, 1991; Ersever, 1996; Fischhoff, Crowell, & Kipke, 1999; Graumlich & Baron, 1991; Schinke & Gilchrist, 1984; Shanteau, Grier, Johnson, & Berner, 1991; Şeyhun, 2000). In the selection, planning, and application stages of the experimental exercises practiced in sessions, support was received from literature. Subsequent to acquiring the relevant information on the objective, timing, place and manner of each single exercise, a planning was scheduled related to the practice of exercises appropriate to the context of each session (DeLucia-Waack, 2006; Güçray, Çolakkadıoğlu, & Çekici, 2009).

Decision-making skill training group applications based on conflict theory was designed as collectively 10 sessions and two pilot studies were conducted. The overall objective of program was to attract attention on the decision-making skills of the adolescents between ages 13-15 related to the decisions that might be effective over life-changing resolutions; by assisting them in gaining attitudes and skills to employ positive decision-making styles, to somehow prevent the negative effects of the lack of relevant skill on academic success, educational guidance and social relations. The program also aims to emphasize the importance of decision-making stages, the significance of widening one's own perspective and selection alternatives as a decision-maker, samples illustrating weak decisions of adolescents in making choices, restrictions and limitations; to encourage adolescents in conducting research during decision-making process and to assist them in the acquisition of decision-making steps.

Psycho-Educational Group

The group type of decision-making skill training group applications conducted in the current research was psycho-educational group. If the objective is to gain new data to members in decision-making, problem solving, communication skills etc., the favored groups are psycho-educational ones (Brown, 2004; DeLucia-Waack, 2006). Psycho-educational groups have educational context and are described as a type of group aiming to develop skills and covering the objectives to achieve (Brown, 1998, 2004; DeLucia-Waack; Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2006; Madrid & Swanson, 1995).

Data Solution

Pretest, final test and persistency data gathered from the experimental and the control groups through Adolescents Decision-Making Questionnaire have been analyzed by ANCOVA corresponding to the research hypothesis with SPSS 11.5 program. In pretest-final test control grouped experimental designs, given that the emphasis is placed on whether the experimental procedure is effective, the most commonly applicable and selected statistical analysis method is covariance analysis (ANCOVA) where pretest is controlled as the covariance (Balcı, 2007; Büyüköztürk, 2002). Furthermore, in the qualitative dimension of research, Group-Related Measures Survey Form completed by leader and assistant leader; Evaluation at the End of Group by Members Form presented to experimental group members have been examined to conclude analysis process.

Results

In order to detect if there was a meaningful differentiation between the final-test scores that groups received from Adolescents Decision-Making Questionnaire subscales, covariance analysis was conducted. The analysis results demonstrated that when groups' pretest scores of Self- Esteem Scale, Vigilance Scale, Complacency Scale, Panic Scale and Cop-Out Scale respectively were brought under control, there was a meaningful differentiation in all subscales between corrected final test average scores[$F_{(1-29)}$ =297.673, p<.001], [$F_{(1-29)}$ =158.293, p<.001], [$F_{(1-29)}$ =73.251, p<.001], [$F_{(1-29)}$ =2.495,

p > .05], [F_(1,29)=107.790, p < .001].

In order to detect if there was a meaningful differentiation between the monitoring test scores groups received from Adolescents Decision-Making Questionnaire subscales, covariance analysis was conducted. The analysis results demonstrated that when groups' final test scores of Self- Esteem Scale, Vigilance Scale, Complacency Scale, Panic Scale and Cop-Out Scale respectively were brought under control, there was a meaningful differentiation in all sub-scales between corrected monitoring test average scores $[F_{(1.29)}=10.304,\ p<.005],\ [F_{(1.29)}=25.002,\ p<.001],\ [F_{(1.29)}=7.214,\ p<.05],\ [F_{(1.29)}=20.834,\ p<.001],\ [F_{(1.29)}=10.487,\ p<.005].$

It was found out that total average scores participants received during each session from Group-Related Measures Survey Form were 20 and above. This finding indicated that participants benefited from group process. Furthermore, it was witnessed that total average score of each session was 32 and above. This finding might be interpreted that sessions reached the objective.

As the answers given by participants to close-ended questions in Evaluation at the end of Group by Members Form were analyzed, it emerged that the participants grasped decision-making stages and felt satisfied in general by the operation of group. In addition to all above, their suggestions on limiting the assignments and forms, presenting a wider range of activities and wider participation into the process attracted attention.

Discussion

At the end of the research it was explored that, parallel to the similar studies focusing on developing decision-making skill in general, decision-making skill training was assistant in gaining the adolescents positive decision-making skills (Baron et al. 1989; Ersever, 1996; Hansen, 1992; Mann, Beswick, Allouche, & Ivey, 1989; Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1988; Ross, 1981; Shanteau et al. 1991; Şeyhun, 2000; Taal & De Carvalho, 1997).

Self-Esteem in Decision Making

In decision-making, self-esteem is an individual's self-evaluation of his/her own decision-making perception in a situation necessitating decision making. The adolescents are likely to feel anxious such: "I wonder if there was a point I missed" when they face a decision-making related situation which makes the adolescents feel doubtful about their decisi-

on (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1988; Ross, 1981). Consequently, in the group applications decisionmaking conflict theory was analyzed in five basic steps and in each step the participants were told the procedures to follow. It was determined that towards the last sessions, participants could be able to express decision making steps as a whole and successfully implemented in decision- relevant sample situations. Josephs, Larrick, Steele, & Nisbett (1992) argued that in a decision making situation if the individual was aware of the things to do and acts accordingly this might be a pushing force in the rise of self esteem. As relevant literature is analyzed, it is detected that in decision making, there is a positive meaningful relationship between self-esteem and general self-esteem (Çolakkadıoğlu & Güçray, 2007; Gücray, 1998; Josephs et al. 1992; Thunholm, 2004). In that case the rise in self-esteem is positively effective over self-esteem in decision making (Çolakkadıoğlu & Güçray; Güçray).

During adolescence period self-judgment exhibits an increase. An adolescent entering the process of identity acquisition starts to question himself/ herself and his/her life. Such questioning may adversely affect self-esteem of adolescents focusing on negative traits. Particularly in situations when they fail to fulfill their responsibilities this situation affects the development of self-esteem negatively (Simmons, 1987; Harter, 1993). Hence rendering support to adolescents in fulfilling their responsibilities, building warm and collaborative relations are positively effective over the development of self-esteem. Harter reports that during adolescence period an adolescent's interactions with people who means a lot for him/her have affirmative effect over his/her self-esteem. Friends are amongst the leading people who mean a lot for an adolescent. Positive feedbacks received from friends can also affect their self-esteem affirmatively (Whitehead & Corbin, 1997). Adolescents in particular need peer-support during this period to achieve a positive self-esteem development (Koon, 1997). In this regard, during decision making skill training group applications too, support was rendered to the participants to identify their decision relevant problems and deal the problems according to the steps; in order to assist them in solving decision problems successfully they were encouraged by leaders and participants and positive feedbacks were provided. Educational value of peer group was taken into consideration. This situation might also have a positive effect on self-esteem levels of participants in decision making.

Vigilance in Decision-Making

Vigilance is defined as the attitude an individual bears while analyzing elaborately positive and negative aspects of a set of alternatives when faced with a decision-making situation. A person acting vigilantly in a decision making situation is the one who possesses knowledge regarding which way to follow that might also be positively effective over self-esteem level as well (Josephs et al. 1992). It was considered that the rise witnessed in experimental group students' scores related to positive coping in decision making was connected to the context of decision making skill training group applications. In decision making skill training group applications, decision making steps were, in each single session, analyzed individually and practiced with participants. Additionally, subsequent to practicing each step, the samples illustrating the application of these steps in decision making situations were examined and by rendering the participants selfinstruction training they were given help in solving decision related problems and at the end of process, each participant was able to solve a decision related problem in line with decision making steps. As relevant literature is analyzed, in studies where the effect of decision making skills development programs is tested it has been determined that adolescents have started to employ positive decision making styles (Baron & Brown, 1991; Byrnes, 1998; Byrnes et al. 1999; Fletcher & Wooddell, 1981; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Klaczynski et al. 2001; Lewis, 1983; Mann, Harmoni et al. 1989; Simon, 1980; Schvaneveldt & Adam, 1983; Strauss & Clark, 1992; Taal & De Carvalho, 1997). In the current research, too, decision making skill training group applications was effective in rising the scores of positive coping style.

Cop-Out, Panic, Complacency

Cop-out, panic and complacency styles in decision making are classified as negative coping styles and analyzed as a unity. Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1988) state that when individuals are taught vigilant decision making steps in decision making, their self-esteem in decision making shall rise whereas the use of negative coping styles shall go down. During decision-making skill training group applications, sample cases were provided to students to exemplify how to apply decision making steps into decision situations and in the aftermath of this process students were able to solve decision problems in line with decision-making steps. In the end, it was observed that the scores of participants in ado-

lescents decision-making questionnaire vigilance sub-scale performed an increase. It could be argued that the rise in scores of vigilance which was a positive decision-making style in decision-making situations of participants decreased their scores in negative decision making styles.

If the individual manages to effectively implement decision making in situations necessitating decision-making, then s/he can efficiently solve the decision related problems which in turn enables a fall in the use of cop-out, panic and complacency styles in decision making. As regards students in experimental group, there was a decrease in cop-out, panic and complacency sub-scales of adolescent decision making questionnaire. The fall witnessed in the scores of sub-scales was attributed to the context of implemented decision making skill training group applications. Conflict-based decision making skill training group applications covered decision-making stages, the significance of widening one's own perspective and selection alternatives as a decision-maker, samples illustrating weak decisions of adolescents in making choices, restrictions, and limitations. Decision-making skill training group applications were been structured in a way to encourage adolescents to conduct research during decision making process as well as gaining decision making steps. Besides, it was planned in a way to enable participants live a decision making experience, gain consistent union of knowledge with respect to the principles of decision making, understand the reasons of wrong decisions and make better and safer decisions, how to control their decisions better, widen their alternatives and at the end of process, it was witnessed that participants reached these objectives. Likewise Mann, Harmoni, and Power (1988), Mann, Beswick et al. (1989) and Seyhun (2000) at the end of their decision making skill training programs detected that there was a fall in the negative coping styles of participants.

Conflict-based decision making skill training group applications' effect on the rise of self-esteem levels and positive coping styles of students during decision making and decrease in the scores of negative coping style was equally permanent in monitoring test. This finding was attributed to the context of implemented decision making skill training group applications. Mann, Beswick et al. (1989) also arrived at similar results.

In the aftermath of this psycho-educational experience, it was observed that all students were able to handle the decision problems they faced in line with decision making steps. In that case, it could reaso-

nably be argued that this situation was effective in improving self-trust of students in their capability, the rise in the scores of their positive coping style which in turn brought a rise in their self-esteem levels and fall in their negative coping style scores. In monitoring test, the rise of students' scores in self-esteem and vigilance in decision making and fall in cop-out, panic and complacency scores could also be taken as an indicator that students managed to solve the decision related problems in line with decision making steps which in turn enabled a rise in self-esteem levels in decision making. This finding may be accepted as an indicator that implemented skill training group applications were longtime.

To sum up, it was determined in the current study that generally speaking, conflict theory based decision making skill training group applications increased students' self-esteem and positive coping style scores in decision making whereas there was a decrease of their scores in negative coping style and the same was valid for monitoring test as well. One restriction of current research was that the effects of decision making skill training group applications were analyzed only with respect to Anatolian High School grade 9 students. In future studies, the same group applications can be conducted over students from different categories and grades of primary education, secondary education and higher education.

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